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ABSTRACT

As state and federal governments and private industry begin to slow the pace of giving to institutions of higher education, the planned giving officer becomes increasingly interested in competing for the gifts given through philanthropy. A study was conducted using 3,006 questionnaires obtained from members of the Association of Planned Giving Officers of Nebraska to identify and prioritize the characteristics of planned giving officers in an effort to make them more effective. Results from a three-stage Delphi survey revealed nine personal characteristics rated highly among the participants: high personal ethical standards; honesty; respect for individual donors; sincerity; good listening skills; people orientation; self-discipline and motivation; and patience. Additionally, it was generally agreed that the planned giving professional should be an "older" individual. Professional characteristics receiving high ratings were: "intricate" knowledge of the institution's mission; knowledge of donor motivations/understanding individual reasons for giving; an ability to work beyond a typical 40-hour work week; organizational abilities; knowledge of planned giving techniques; and the ability to work with volunteers. Contains eight references. (GLR)

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Characteristics of Planned Giving Officers: Practicing Professionals Perceptions

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RUNNING HEAD: Planned Giving Officer Characteristics

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Introduction

As competition for philanthropic gifts continues to increase, the formalization of development officer training has grown substantially. Conferences, workshops, training seminars, and even certification programs for development officers have been introduced for non-profit organizations within the past ten to fifteen years. Some of these activities have even been expanded into degree and certification level programs, at such institutions as Vanderbilt University, Mankato State University, George Washington University, and the Harvard Center for Lifelong Learning. With this highlighted attention to the fund raising process and fund raisers, the purpose of this study was to identify and prioritize the characteristics of planned giving officers.

The necessity for qualified, highly trained fund raising professionals has not only been prompted by competition for charitable gifts, but also from what the Filer Commission of 1973 termed as the "Third Sector." Douglas (1983) noted that the state and federal governments and private industry comprise the first two sectors in America, while voluntary and philanthropic organizations make up the Third Sector. The purpose of this sector, Douglas explained, was to meet the needs of society which the other two sectors have traditionally and currently fail to fulfill. A specific example of the need for a successful Third Sector is the fact that many states have failed to fund higher education at a pace equivalent to inflation.

Incidents concerning ethics within the non-profit sector have similarly brought attention to the need for training and understanding the professional fund raiser. Yet consensus on the training of ethical behavior has not been reached.

Despite the concerns and issues mentioned above shrouding non-profits in America, giving has continued to increase to unprecedented levels. Only one year ago, giving reached $104.4 billion, an increase of nearly 7% over 1988. Almost 90%

of these gifts came from individuals, including almost $7 billion in bequests (Goss, 1989). For higher education alone, bequests increased 13.6%, despite smaller gifts from individuals and fewer gifts of stock (Bailey, 1989).

Due to the increase and the variety of gifts contributed, many planned giving officers have turned their attention to the characteristics and training of those working in planned giving. This study was designed to aid in that investigation by studying those working in planned giving in relation to background and the desired traits and qualifications.

The members of the Association of Planned Giving Officers of Nebraska were surveyed using the guidelines developed by the NSFRE 1985 Membership Survey. The first section dealt primarily with the length of time working in the fund raising profession, the length of time specifically working in planned giving, demographics such as age, gender, salary, and level of education, participation in other voluntary organizations, type of non-profit employer, and the reliance of their non-profit employers on planned gifts. To expand on the reliance of planned gifts, the survey also included items which addressed the total amount of money the organization raised during the past fiscal year and the percentage which was attributed to planned gifts, the main source of gifts, and the most common types of planned gifts received. A three-round Delphi survey was utilized to obtain group consensus on the desired traits of planned giving officers.

For the purpose of this study, planned giving was defined as including appreciated property, bequests, bargain sales, charitable remainder trusts, contracts to make a will, estate notes, life insurance, non-trust future interests, and pooled income funds. The operational definition was not limited to these types of gifts, however, and included "any gift of a major nature which requires the donor to give careful consideration to the manner in which the gift is given" (Rhodes, 1987).

Background of the Study

While the concept of this research is unique to the fund raising profession, there have been a number of references made to the necessary qualification of fund raising professionals. Ast, Moore, and Rook (1986) contended that essential for all fund raising professionals is the knowledge of technical skills (the "how-to's" of fund raising), human relations skills (ability to work with groups, motivate others, etc.), and conceptual skills (ability to understand the 'big picture,' and how to understand how the various phases of development interact).

In addition to these skill areas, the authors, through their combined experience, found there were four elements of management essential to fund raising success: an ability to analyze, plan, execute, and evaluate programs. In terms of personality characteristics, they have found strong egos were important to the successful development officer, to help the individual accept and cope with negative responses to gift solicitations.

Although no formal development training programs have provided comprehensive preparation for fund raising, Ast, Moore, and Rook advocated involvement with a professional organization such as CASE, NAHD, and NSFRE. In terms of a college education for individuals wanting for work in the fund raising profession, they recommended a traditional liberal arts background or business administration courses as the best preparation.

The success, or failure, of philanthropic organizations is based on the quality of the organization's fund raising efforts. The results of these efforts, in turn, are directly related to the quality of staff members working with the fund raising. In selecting these potentially successful fund raisers, special attention should be given to what motivates the individual (Brakeley, 1980). The fund raiser should be motivated by "a real belief in the value of the organization's work" (p. 18). That

is, the fund raisers should believe strongly enough in the type of work the organization does to try and enhance the quality of work for personal as well as professional reasons.

Additionally, Brakeley felt that the fund raiser must be committed to the non-profit sector. While opposition to the industrial sector is not necessary, recognizing and believing in the value of philanthropic organizations enhances the effectiveness of a fund raiser.

Burdette (1987) described the ideal fund raiser as one with experience, not only in fund raising, but in office management. High energy levels, both physical and emotional, enthusiasm, perspective, understanding, commitment, aggressiveness to the extent that it is compatible with the office, honesty, passion, and a personal chemistry with the staff were all described as necessities for fund raising professionals. The main thrust of Burdette's contentions were that the fund raiser must be able to work well within an office prior to working with potential donors.

Experience in office management was also described as essential to development officers by Nichols (1987). He termed the successful fund raiser a "Theory D Executive," possessing such traits as the ability to design programs, devoted to donors, delegator of responsibilities, decisive, and among others, a dreamer, able to envision the success of the organizations endeavors.

As mentioned previously, the precedent for this study was the 1985 NSFRE follow up survey to the 1981 demographic and salary survey of its members (Mongron, 1985). Of the 5,630 NSFRE members surveyed, 3,006 usable responses were used in the tabulations. This 53% return rate was used to develop averages for the profession by type of organization, including: educational institutions, hospital/medical centers, national health agencies, national social agencies, youth organizations, cultural organizations, religious organizations,

retirement communities, conservation, wildlife, and environmental agencies, and consulting firms.

The survey revealed that over 60% of the respondents were age 35-54, while 33 was the average age upon entering the profession. The typical development officer responding to the survey had spent 10 years in the profession, while being employed by 3 employers. Of the respondents, 45% worked 41-48 hours per week, while 24% worked 49-55 hours per week. In terms of educational achievement, 93% had graduated from college, including 11% which had completed a doctoral degree (including the J.D.).

While this survey and other references have been comprehensive, they have not separated characteristics based on the type of fund raising position held. Additionally, this literature has focused on generating responses to questions with specific pre-generated responses or experience in the profession.

Study Results

The first two sections of the study were administered to 17 senior-level planned giving officers who were members of the Association of Planned Giving Officers of Nebraska. Of these survey respondents, 70% were male, and 41% were between the ages of 35 to 49, while 46% were over the age of 50. These planned giving officers had spent an average of 8.5 years in the fund raising profession, and 6 years specifically working in planned giving. Only 17% had completed a doctoral degree, including the J.D., but over 88% had graduated from college.

In terms of the hours worked per week, 53% reported working 41 to 48 hours, 29% reported working 49 to 55 hours, and 11% reported working 56 to 62 hours per week. For this work, 41% claimed an annual salary between $30,000 and $44,999, while 29% made $45,000 to $59,999. Only two of the respondents reported holding

either NSFRE or NAHD certification. Nearly 80% of those completing the survey reported involvement with other non-profit organizations, averaging involvement in at least two other organizations.

The type of employer was evenly distributed with 11% of the respondents among five types of organizations each: religious, local service, hospital/medical centers, retirement communities, and conservation/wildlife/environmental. Over 20% (23.5%) were employed by educational institutions, while youth organizations, national service organizations, and consultants were each marginally represented. Of these agencies, 47% reported raising under $1 million during the 1989 fiscal year, 29% raised between $1 and $5 million, and 11% reported raising $5 to $10 and $10 to $15 million. Of this income, annual gifts were the main source of income for 56% of the respondents' organizations, and planned gifts accounted for under 10% of the total amount received in charitable gifts for 50% of the respondents. Over 25% of the total amount raised in charitable gifts was reported by 30% of the respondents.

Only 59% reported an increase in planned gifts received during the 1989 fiscal year. Of those reporting an increase, 20% had an increase of 5% to 10%, while 30% had an increase of 15% to 25%. The most common type of planned gifts received were bequests, charitable remainder trusts, charitable gift annuities, and appreciated property.

Of the original 17 planned giving officers of study, 15 completed all three rounds of the Delphi survey. The original 17 generated 46 traits they felt essential to planned giving officers, of which, the final 15 reached a high degree of consensus (group mean of 3.5 or higher) on 37 statements. These statements fell into two distinct categories: personal characteristics and professional attributes. The vast majority of the high consensus traits (25) were personal

characteristics.

The 25 statements constituting personal characteristics all revolved around an individual's personality. Nine of these statements achieved an extraordinarily high degree of consensus (>4.5) in the final group ranking. These 9 included: high personal ethical standards, honesty, respect for individual donors, sincerity, good listening skills, people oriented, self-disciplined and self-motivated, and patient. Additionally, the respondents agreed (4.2) that the planned giving professional should be an "older" individual.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Only six statements of the original 50 achieved a high degree of group consensus that could be categorized as professional attributes. The highest degree of consensus was an individual's "intricate" knowledge of the institution's mission (4.58). Other attributes included a knowledge of donor motivations/understanding individual reasons for giving (4.16), an ability to work beyond a typical 40-hour work week (4.18), organizational abilities (4.08), knowledge of planned giving techniques (4.0), and ability to work with volunteers.

The additional 14 items which did not achieve a high degree of group consensus included, among others, experience in private business, finance and taxation, law or accounting, a college degree, a math background, involvement with other fund raising organizations, and civic minded.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Discussion

The literature which currently exists on fund raising professionals is unique in that it has not been scientifically explored or concentrated on the types of different fund raising positions within an organization. This research was designed to address these two areas, and focus on the traits of planned giving officers. Indeed, much of what Ast, Moore, and Rook, as well as Brakeley and Burdette proposed as necessary for fund raisers was confirmed. The ideal planned giving officer is one who is committed to the organization and those it serves, while maintaining strong inter-office and inter-personal skills.

While no major discrepancies were found between the individual responses to the first demographic-type section of the survey and desired traits, formal education was revealed as a point of interest. Over 88% of the respondents reported holding at least a bachelor's degree, but a college level education had little degree of importance to the group (3.2).

A similar instance was found when examining involvement in civic and other non-profit organizations. While 76% of the original respondents reported being involved in other voluntary organizations, averaging involvement in at least 2 other organizations, the concept of civic minded and participation in other fund raising organizations had a combined group mean rating of only 2.9.

From the results of this study, it is evident that planned giving officers have a preference to those traits which they themselves possess. Their success or failure, then, can best serve as an indicator of the appropriateness of these traits for future planned giving officers. As educational fund raising continues to become more formalized and training programs are developed, the involvement of fund raising professionals in curriculum content selection may perhaps be the most effective way to assure quality future professionals.

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Table 1.

Personal Characteristics Achieving A High

Degree of Group Consensus*

Trait/Characteristic	Group Mean Rating
High ethical standards	4.9
Honesty	4.83
Respect for individual donors	4.8
Sincerity	4.6
Good listener	4.58
"People" oriented	4.58
Self-disciplined and self-motivated	4.58
Ability to initiate communication	4.5
Patient	4.5
Eagerness to learn	4.41
Sensitive	4.3
Strong communication skills	4.3
Older individual	4.27
Empathy for older persons	4.25
Caring personality	4.16
Strong individual work ethic	4.16
Pleasing personality	4.08
Outgoing personality	4.0
Sense of timing	3.91
Ability to conceptualize	3.9
Personal warmth	3.9
Organizational abilities	3.9
Willingness to travel	3.9
Ability to work alone	3.75
Assertive	3.75
Compassionate	3.58

*Group mean rating of the statement/characteristic above 3.5, on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 5.

Table 2.

Characteristics Receiving a

Low Degree of Consensus

Trait/Characteristic	Group Mean Rating
Hold a college degree	3.36
Knowledge of taxation and finance	3.18
Knowledge of community	3.09
Civic minded	3.0
Well known in community	2.54
Wide range of friends for support	2.5
Wide range of friends for reference	2.5
Involved with other fund raising programs	2.36
Math background	1.81
Experience in private business	1.7
Taken courses in accounting	1.63
Taken courses in law	1.54
Hold an accounting degree	1.4
Hold a law degree	1.36